

Combining Conservation and Care: Lessons Learned from Population Environment Initiatives



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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this *Combining Conservation and Care* publication series is to highlight key observations, findings, and lessons learned from the Population Environment (PE) programs of Conservation International (CI) in Cambodia, Guatemala, the Philippines, Madagascar, and Mexico. PE projects in these countries have achieved results in our target zones that have improved access to health services while increasing education and awareness of the importance of reducing family size and population pressure on natural resources. These efforts have contributed to improved biodiversity conservation in critical areas through improved natural resource management.

Through the course of our work, CI has learned valuable lessons about several themes: engaging communities in participatory ways, fostering and sustaining local partnerships, promoting alternative livelihoods, incorporating gender into conservation, and involving indigenous people in conservation. These lessons are summarized here, along with an overview of the four current PE country programs' objectives and results to date.



CI and partners are helping communities understand links between health and conservation.

Population Environment at Conservation International



Conservation will not succeed in the absence of people-oriented strategies to enhance stewardship of natural resources.

HISTORY OF PE AT CI

Through its Centers for Biodiversity Conservation in five hotspots, CI's impact soared from helping place 6.2 million acres of land under protection or enhanced management in 2001 to 54.4 million acres in 2003. During the same period, the organization's partnerships grew from 18 to 166, and CI dedicated one-third of its budget to support the work of partner groups, large and small. CI recognizes that for biodiversity conservation to be lasting, it must improve the lives of local people. Our experience during the past 18 years has shown that conservation will not succeed in the absence of people-oriented strategies to enhance stewardship of the land and natural resources.

CI's experience implementing community-based conservation has produced lasting results through a community empowerment and ownership approach. Recognizing the significant threat to biodiversity from human population growth and poverty, CI implemented projects to deliver access to reproductive health and family planning (RH/FP) services to remote populations living in some of the world's critical hotspots. In 1997, CI's PE program began working in Mexico, Guatemala, and Belize, by strengthening midwife networks to ensure safe deliveries, providing RH/FP services to the community, and engaging communities in conservation dialogues. During the next eight years, CI worked with partners and communities to promote biodiversity conservation and human welfare enhancements in health, income-generation, and education.

Following on the initial midwife training work in the region, the David and Lucille Packard Foundation awarded CI a grant in early 2001 to implement an integrated health and conservation project in the Selva Lacandona, particularly the area surrounding the Montes Azules Biosphere Reserve. The Selva Lacandona in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas has some of the highest levels of biological diversity in Mexico and the Mesoamerica hotspot. This vast reserve of floral and faunal species is under increasing pressure from rapid population growth and unsustainable natural resource utilization patterns. In response to these critical threats to biological diversity and human welfare, CI worked with the Mexican Social Security Institute (IMSS), Population Action International (PAI), and local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to deliver integrated health and conservation programming.

In 2002, the Office of Population and Reproductive Health of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) awarded CI the Healthy Families, Healthy Forests grant to increase understanding and adoption of integrated PE approaches to conserving biodiversity. Under this grant, CI and local NGO partners helped rural communities to understand the relationship between having smaller, healthier families and improving stewardship of natural resources and protecting forests that are habitat for globally significant biodiversity. The desired result was to facilitate a transition of such communities from poor, subsistence agriculturalists to economically stable families with diverse livelihoods

Selected PE Portfolio Results*

Some of the PE project results include the following:

- Raised contraceptive prevalence rates (CPRs) in the Philippines and Madagascar by an average of 5 percent in each target area during 2004;
- Raised the CPR in our target zone in Mexico from an average of 7.7 percent in 2001 to 36.7 percent by the end of 2003;
- Increased maternal and child health service utilization (including vaccinations and safe deliveries) in all target sites; The Cooperative for American Relief Everywhere (CARE) International began delivering health services to 3000 people in the Cardamoms Conservation Landscape in Cambodia for the first time;
- Forged partnerships with government and nongovernment reproductive health programs to deliver reproductive health and family planning activities and implement conservation or natural resource management activities;
- Worked with partners to develop activities that functionally link reproductive health education with conservation and natural resource management; and,
- Built the capacity of local partners to create mechanisms for continued provision of integrated reproductive health and biodiversity programming after the project's conclusion.

* PE program activities in Guatemala, funded by US Agency for International Development under the Healthy Families, Healthy Forests grant, were suspended in December 2003.

and a working knowledge of resource management and biodiversity protection. Furthermore, CI hopes to enable a shift from large, unplanned families to couples with access to quality reproductive health care who plan both the number and the spacing of their children. Taken together, these efforts are benefiting not only global conservation but also the people taking care of these vital resources.

OVERVIEW OF PE COUNTRY PROGRAMS

Key threats to biodiversity conservation in areas of high population growth include lack of access to family planning and reproductive health, human population migration and encroachment of human settlements in key biodiversity areas, unsustainable natural resource management, and slash-and-burn agricultural practices. These threats are being addressed through CI's ongoing PE activities, and the

sites selected for the project were examined for key biodiversity relevance, state of external pressures, and enabling conditions for enacting responses to address threats.

Cambodia

Encompassing more than two million square kilometers of tropical Asia, the Indo-Burma hotspot is still revealing its biological treasures. The hotspot contains Cambodia's Cardamoms Conservation Landscape (CCL), an area with the world's largest remaining population of critically endangered Siamese crocodiles, previously thought to be extinct. The area's remarkable endemism in freshwater turtle species is threatened with extinction because of overharvesting and habitat loss. The CCL contains more than 30 globally threatened species and provides vital watershed services to southwestern Cambodia and parts of Thailand.

CI Cambodia works with communities in five communes around the CCL to protect this biologically rich terrestrial habitat. The project started in February 2004, when CI began working with Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE) International and Save Cambodia's Wildlife to reduce population pressures on biodiversity in the CCL. Population growth poses an important threat to biodiversity in the CCL, from both natural growth and migration within the landscape. Rural populations in this area lack access to basic RH/FP services, which directly influences fertility rates. In addition, as rural populations expand, extraction of natural resources from protected areas



Cardamoms Conservation Landscape in southwestern Cambodia.

of the CCL is becoming unsustainable. Without a means to develop economic alternative activities, pressure on rare and endangered species will increase.



PE staff and children at a Dalaw-Turo IEC session.

The project has three objectives:

- Enable target communities to adopt safe RH/FP practices and to improve access to quality RH/FP services, thereby mitigating population pressures on biodiversity.
- Support effective integration of RH/FP services into local government planning and to build local capacities for natural resource management and biodiversity conservation.
- Improve regional planning for conservation and development in the CCL through demographic analyses and threat-migration strategies.

Results to date include the following:

- With CARE, CI increased access to RH/FP services by improving both existing health services and supply and emergency referral services. CI and CARE brought the first-ever health services to remote areas of the CCL by

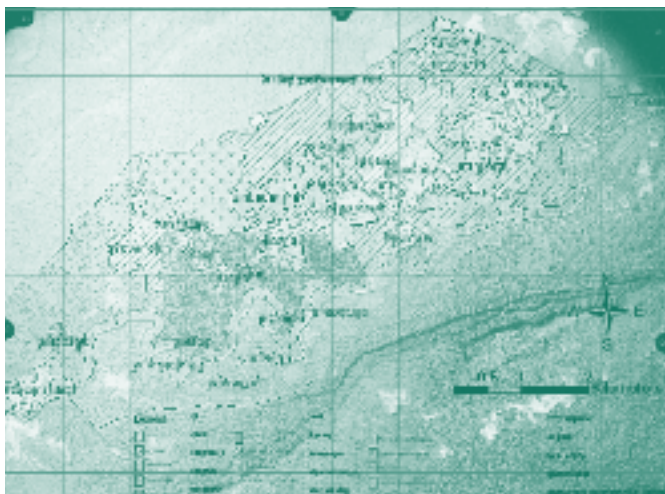
building a health post in Thma Bang and starting outreach nursing and health worker visits.

- CARE delivered vaccination services to remote areas as well, with mothers and babies lining up at the health post to receive necessary shots in the first few months of the health post operation.
- The project initiated women's associations in two communes intended to improve livelihoods and to ultimately increase demand for RH/FP.
- The project facilitated Participatory Land Use Planning (PLUP) exercises in four communes in the CCL, integrating community resource needs with conservation in the target provinces. More than 1,200 people participated in the PLUP process.
- The project facilitated RH/FP and conservation priorities into commune development plans.
- The project strengthened commune council capacity, through increased participation by women, for community-based natural resource management.
- The project began preliminary assessment of demographic trends in the CCL region to ensure that threats to biodiversity and opportunities to achieve conservation outcomes are considered in regional development plans.

The Philippines

The Philippines hotspot contains more than 7,100 islands and is one of the world's most biologically rich countries. Many endemic species are confined to the fragmented forest that covers only 7 percent of the original extent of the hotspot. The Sierra Madre Biodiversity Corridor (SMBC) is one among the most biologically diverse subregions in the country. A stronghold of globally threatened species, SMBC preserves 22 percent of the country's remaining forest resources and 40 percent of old-growth forests. At the same time, the Philippine provinces of Cagayan and Isabela stand out as being at high risk for population growth and increased degradation of the natural resources.

The PE project is located in the municipality of Baggao in the province of Cagayan in northern Luzon and is



The Sierra Madre Biological Corridor, northern Philippines.

located in the SMBC. The project began in October 2002 to engage communities living in and around the biodiversity hotspot in activities that integrate biodiversity conservation with improved access to RH/FP services and information.

Working with communities inside or near the forests where in-migration and fertility are high, CI, NGOs, and government partners are attempting to address the lack of access to RH/FP services, which has led to rapid population growth, thereby causing increased unsustainable use of forest resources. Many of these forests are included in concessions as community-based forest management (CBFM) areas and ancestral domains of indigenous peoples. However, they remain barely managed. Thus, uncontrolled timber poaching and clearing of forestland continue to destroy the forest, reducing further the forest's capacity to meet the future needs of the communities, as habitat to diverse flora and fauna, and to sustain environmental services critical for the communities' survival, which include the supply of water for irrigation of their farms and for domestic use.

The project objectives are to:

- Encourage and enable residents of reproductive age (15 to 49 years) in 6 barangays to adopt safe and appropriate RH/FP practices; and
- Build the capacity of target communities to effectively manage their CBFM and Certificate of Ancestral Domain Claim (CADC) projects for sustained resource yields and biodiversity protection.

Results to date include the following:

- CI and partners strengthened RH/FP services by building the capacity of Local Government Units (LGUs) and more than 400 barangay health workers and other local health workers in Baggao.
- The project promoted effective delivery of RH/FP supplies and related services to the local communities in the target area, including raising the Contraceptive Prevalence Rate (CPR) in our target zone to 65 percent in 2004 and 2005.
- The project strengthened the information, education, and communication (IEC) awareness campaign to build a conservation- and population-conscious constituency, reaching more than 1,000 people since the project began.
- CI and partners provided technical assistance and support for the overall integration of barangay plans, Community Resource Management Frameworks, and Ancestral Domain Sustainable Development and Protection Plans with the Municipal Comprehensive Land-Use Plan of Baggao.
- The project built local capacity of people's organizations, indigenous people, and the LGUs to effectively implement their development plans and enforce conservation policies and initiatives.



CI's partner PROCESS-Luzon staff working in the Sierra Madre Biological Corridor.



A local Philippine man, selling goods from his boat.

- The project provided technical assistance for agroforestry and promoted other biodiversity-compatible economic activities that will engage men, women, and youth within the covered barangays.
- The project worked with the local communities and other key stakeholders (LGUs, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, and the National Commission on Indigenous People) to set up a community-based monitoring and evaluation system for sustainable natural resources management and biodiversity protection of the project site.
- The project improved management systems for the sustainable protection and maintenance of biodiversity in three CBFM areas and one CADC. LGU and community policies and projects are addressing links between RH/FP, in-migration, and natural resource management.

Madagascar

The Madagascar and Indian Ocean Islands hotspot has an outstanding total of eight plant families, five bird families, and five primate families that live nowhere else on Earth.

Madagascar's 61 lemur species and subspecies are the island's charismatic worldwide ambassadors for conservation, although tragically 15 species have been driven to extinction since humans arrived. The Zahamena-Mantadia Biological Corridor protects some of the island's last remaining tropical forests and lemur habitats.

In this unique landscape, CI works with communities in and around the Zahamena-Mantadia Corridor, which is located in the eastern part of the country. This band of forest represents some of the last remaining lowland and mid-elevation primary forest ecosystems in the country. Zahamena National Park and Mantadia National Park, located in the northern and southern ends of the corridor, respectively, are anchors for CI's corridor conservation strategy.

The PE project started in July 2003, and CI works with its Malagasy partners, ASOS (Action Santé Organisation Secours) and MATEZA. Later that year, the president of Madagascar committed to tripling the surface area of protected areas in his country, the pinnacle of Madagascar's commitment to natural resource conservation. In a country rich in biodiversity but socioeconomically poor, the president recognized that conservation is essential for socioeconomic development. This conservation commitment presents a formidable challenge in rural areas, where the absence of alternative economic practices forces farmers to convert forest to subsistence agricultural practices, known as tavy,



The Zahamena-Mantadia Biological Corridor in eastern Madagascar.

or slash-and-burn. In addition, minimal access to RH/FP care, high fertility rates, poverty, and minimal education levels combine to produce increasing pressures on natural resources.

The project objectives are to:

- Increase local capacity in child and maternal health and improve access to quality RH/FP services in the target communities. (In the Madagascar PE project, the term reproductive health care includes attention to maternal and child health.)
- Enable corridor communities to manage their forest resources more effectively for both sustainable livelihood and biodiversity conservation.

Results to date include the following:

- CI and partners reached more than 2,000 village residents with IEC messages to improve understanding of RH/FP and its importance to healthy families and a healthy environment. They also helped to raise the CPR in target zones by an average of 5 to 6 percent, to an average of 11 to 14 percent in rural areas.
- The project increased vaccination coverage rates in the target zones from December 2004 to June 2005 for children 0 to 5 years old by an average of 15 to 20 percent per commune.
- The project trained 200 community health promoters in basic RH/FP with links to environmental health in all communities and priority sites, and it fostered more than 20 community action plans that included the aspect of biodiversity conservation.
- CI and partners worked with communities to implement natural resource management plans for a subset of communities in the target areas and to improve soil and natural resource management through ongoing capacity building activities.
- The project implemented alternative livelihood and nutrition training and capacity building for 55 Women's Nutrition Teams.



Selva Lacandona forest in southern Mexico.

- The project promoted implementation of new agricultural production practices by training more than 100 farmers in 2004 and 2005.

Mexico

The Selva Lacandona sits in the Mesoamerica hotspot and contains some of the highest levels of biodiversity found in the Americas, yet its forests are under extreme threat from agricultural conversion by a rapidly growing population. The Montes Azules Biosphere Reserve, in the heart of this biodiversity hotspot, includes one of the last large expanses of intact humid forest in Mesoamerica, providing habitat for vast floral and faunal reserves of high-profile globally threatened species such as the Jaguar and Harpy eagle. This area is under tremendous population pressures, such as migration and high birth rates—a result of minimal access to health services, low income and poor infrastructure—and poverty persists in this area. Furthermore, many people have limited options for earning a living, given the minimal education and lack of schools, combined with few economic alternatives to subsistence agriculture.

Since 2001, CI and our partners have made substantial strides toward combining biodiversity protection education with improved sexual and reproductive health service delivery in three key communities bordering the Montes Azules Biosphere Reserve. By building the communities' confidence

and trust in project staff members, CI and our partners have been able to work in these communities and make progress toward improving RH/FP service delivery and awareness, as well as increasing conservation awareness and promoting sustainable resource management.

The project objectives are to:

- Increase access to and information on sexual and reproductive health in communities around the Montes Azules Biosphere Reserve;
- Help communities to increase capacity to sustainably manage resources, especially the adolescent populations;
- Promote the empowerment of women through participation in microenterprises for conservation.

Results to date include the following:

- The project increased knowledge and use of RH/FP methods in the three target communities around the Reserve. We have helped to increase the CPR from an average of 8 percent in 2001 to 37 percent by the end of 2003. CPR increased slightly in 2004 and 2005.



Forest fires threaten Mexico's Selva Lacandona.

- The project increased awareness of environmental impacts of harmful agricultural practices through agroforestry projects and environmental education sessions.
- CI and partners expanded economic opportunities for women through women's groups and microenterprise activities.
- Our work has reached more than 60 communities served by the network of rural health clinics of the Mexican Social Security Institute (IMSS).
- CI and partners delivered more than 70 training sessions and workshops on reproductive and sexual health, environmental services and stewardship, and microenterprise skills to more than 3,600 people (including medical staff members, community organizers, health promoters, midwives, adolescents, farmers, and community women and men). These events ranged from short meetings to workshops comprising more than 200 hours of training time.

We have learned many valuable lessons about the challenges of forging and sustaining partnerships among diverse organizations, integrating health and conservation activities, and eliciting stakeholder and community participation in areas of civil unrest, such as in Emiliano Zapata, one of our original intervention sites, which we had to abandon in early 2002 because of the potential risk to project staff members. Although much work remains in terms of improving health and welfare in this key biodiversity area, we have made demonstrable achievements in the Selva Lacandona, and there are valuable lessons learned to share with other PE projects worldwide.

SUMMARY OF LESSONS LEARNED

During the past five years, CI and our partners have learned valuable lessons through the implementation of field-based activities to improve health and conservation outcomes. We have used these lessons to improve our technical approaches to communicate with communities and local stakeholders, to refine our key messages to local and regional government authorities, and to share our successes as models for replication.

Some of the key results achieved and lessons learned by CI and our partners include the following:



PE staff and indigenous women in southern Mexico.

People need to see the benefits of conservation in order to pursue conservation. In Cambodia, community members perceived and understood the benefits of participating in planning for local land use in order to conserve valuable natural resources. This led to increasing participation by the community members.

Communities need to actively participate in conservation on all scales. The Philippines PE project built capacity for natural forest management with NGOs and community groups by tapping into local knowledge and adapting local techniques. These efforts have improved forest management in the Sierra Madre Biodiversity Corridor.

Health outcomes provide an entry point for communities to adopt conservation outcomes. Working with communities to improve health outcomes among the human population builds goodwill and acts as an entry point to discuss broader conservation goals, thereby creating good rapport with communities and local stakeholders. CI's collaboration with CARE International in the Cardamom Mountains is a visible partnership, responding to local needs. The two organizations have worked together to create an effective emergency transport system for patients in remote areas to reach health services.

Building lasting partnerships and relationships requires leadership, commitment, and persistence. Working with established health, development, or conservation NGOs in a local area greatly enhances and facilitates progress, because the seeds of cooperation were already planted and potentially nurtured for several years.

Joint action, rather than competition, ensures solid results. In all four countries where CI is implementing PE projects, we have found that collaborative partnership with multisectoral NGOs and community groups allows us to leverage resources, minimize overlapping activities and create stronger programs.

Action speaks louder than words. For example, agreements with communities, Memoranda of Understanding, and other documents must be put into action. In the Philippines, CI learned through working with local government and institutions that communities value and respond to actions to operationalize these documents.

The involvement of indigenous peoples and organizations is integral to achieving conservation sustainability. In Mexico and the Philippines, CI and partners worked closely with indigenous groups located near the biodiversity target zone to ensure conservation outcomes were integrated into project activities.

Partnerships require respect for the culture of indigenous peoples. Building lasting partnerships for conservation with indigenous peoples requires organizations to respect indigenous people's customs, traditions, and laws throughout the project stages—from planning and implementing the project to monitoring and evaluating its results. Sometimes project implementers bring packages of interventions without considering the customs, traditions, and customary laws of indigenous groups, and the project fails.

Incorporating gender analysis about roles and responsibilities can improve conservation efforts. Involving women in the agro-forestry and forest monitoring activities—traditionally the domain of men—increased tree planting and reporting of forest infractions and improved project results in the Philippines.

Partners need to identify solid, agreed-upon indicators of project performance. Doing so is essential to ensuring partners have ownership and responsibility for project activities. Regional coordination is essential. Although most PE activities take place at the local level, it is important to ensure higher-level regional coordination with government institutions and other partners. Such coordination can help prevent the conflicts that may arise between government initiatives and PE goals.

NEXT STEPS

CI plans to continue disseminating our lessons learned in PE programs in order to improve conservation practice and achieve outcomes. Through a new three-year cooperative agreement with USAID, CI will continue our PE work in Cambodia, Madagascar, and the Philippines. In addition, we will work to improve documenting the links between better health and conservation in a scientifically rigorous manner, in accordance with our institutional human welfare and conservation stewards objectives.

PHOTO CREDITS

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